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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 008441

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [IZ](#) [FR](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH OFFICIALS STRESS THE POSITIVE TO IRAQ  
ADVISOR DEUTSCH, WITHOUT SUGGESTING NEW ASSISTANCE

REF: PARIS 8171

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary and comment: Senior Presidency and MFA officials stressed GoF support for Iraq's political process and the Arab League reconciliation effort during December 5 meetings with visiting Deputy Senior Iraq Advisor Deutsch. French officials expressed willingness to help support Iraqi reconciliation, including by sending messages to other Europeans and sending the French Ambassador to Iraq to Washington for consultations. While GoF officials affirmed GoF willingness to assist Iraq and deepen contacts with Iraq's permanent government, they emphasized existing programs over new assistance. French officials confirmed that the GoF would soon sign a 4 billion euro debt reduction agreement with Iraq, in line with Paris Club terms. GoF officials emphasized that the GoF was not calling for an immediate U.S. pullout or a withdrawal timetable, but repeated familiar concerns on the need to offer Iraqis a "perspective" on an eventual pull-out. French officials were in information-seeking mode throughout the discussions, and generally avoided contentious issues, though one working-level MFA official raised UNMOVIC. End summary and comment.

2. (SBU) Deputy Senior Iraq Advisor Robert Deutsch briefed senior GoF officials December 5 on the comprehensive U.S. strategy in Iraq and political prospects before and after December elections. Deutsch met separately with MFA A/S-equivalent for North Africa/Middle East Jean-Francois Thibault, Presidential Middle East/Americas Dominique Boche, and MFA DAS-equivalent for Iraq/Iran/Arabian Gulf Affairs Antoine Sivan, who was accompanied by MFA Iraq desk officers David Cvach and Bernard Chappedelaine and MFA UN/Iraq action officer Nicolas Kassianides. In addition to official meetings, Deutsch completed an extensive range of French- and English-language public diplomacy events December 5, including an on-the record briefing for French and Arab journalists, a "France-Inter" radio interview, an interview with "Arabies" magazine correspondent Christian Malar, and roundtable discussion with students at the Paris Institute of Political Science (Sciences-Po). Questions at these PD events focused largely on prospects for a continued U.S. troop presence in Iraq, U.S. public opinion, and U.S. views on Iranian and Syrian interference.

SUNNI INCLUSION, ARAB LEAGUE INITIATIVE

3. (C) GoF and Presidency officials uniformly welcomed Deutsch's detailed briefing on the U.S. political/economic/security strategy in Iraq and prospects for December elections. MFA NEA A/S-equivalent Thibault agreed on the importance of December elections, but stressed that the period after elections would be crucial as well, as it would offer the chance to amend the constitution and achieve greater national reconciliation. In the latter context, Thibault asked whether the U.S. was thinking of "new guarantees" which would help rally the engagement of the vast majority of Sunnis who voted against the draft constitution. Thibault stressed that the international community should send a consistent message on the importance of Iraq's territorial integrity, rule of law, sovereignty, and inclusiveness. He reiterated GoF support for the Arab League-led reconciliation effort, on which he said France was ready to help, including by delivering messages to other European governments. Presidential advisor Boche also affirmed that the GoF was "ready to play a role" in advancing Iraqi national reconciliation, and commended the Arab League initiative for promoting dialogue between communities, as well as offering a responsible role for Iraq's neighbors. Boche also noted GoF readiness to send French Ambassador to Iraq Bernard Bajolet to Washington to discuss the inclusion issue further, as had already been proposed by Presidential Diplomatic Advisor Maurice Gourdault-Montagne in Washington.

4. (C) Deutsch concurred on the importance of Sunni inclusion, and noted extensive U.S. efforts to advance this goal. While the final statement of the Cairo preparatory meeting contained some elements which were not to USG liking, the Arab League effort indicated a willingness of Arab governments to deal with Iraq in a new context, and could serve to drive a wedge between terrorists and extremists and

the broader Sunni population. In response to concerns expressed by Thibault that delays in forming a permanent government could potentially delay the proposed late February/March time-frame for a national reconciliation conference, Deutsch cautioned that it would be up to the next Iraqi government to decide how to handle the proposed conference, and that it was difficult to predict how long formation of this government might take. The key was to produce a capable, permanent government. Presidential advisor Boche also expressed concerns over the timing of the proposed Arab League reconciliation conference, and expressed regret that the conference might be "too late," in that it would take place before formation of a permanent government. Deutsch, in contrast, questioned whether the reconciliation conference might be "too early" and cautioned against internationalizing Iraq's reconciliation, which remained an Iraqi responsibility.

FOCUS ON EXISTING, VICE NEW FRENCH ASSISTANCE; DEBT RELIEF  
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15. (C) Thibault reaffirmed the GoF's desire to deepen relations with Iraq, and noted positively the recent visit to Paris by Iraqi FM Zebari (reftel). Although Thibault reaffirmed GoF willingness to "deepen" assistance to Iraq, he avoided discussion of new assistance and focused instead on existing GoF programs, such as the EU JUSTLEX program and short-term exchanges for Iraqi students in France (reftel). Seeking to dispel the notion that France "isn't doing anything" to help Iraq, Thibault declared that total French assistance to Iraq in 2005, if one included cooperation credits and the French contribution to EU Iraq funds, totaled some 50 million euros. (Comment: The 50 million euros is a new figure from the GoF; MFA contacts later told us that EU contributions made up 34 million of this sum. End comment.) When asked how the GoF intended to deepen assistance to Iraq, Thibault raised the long-stalled GoF offer to train Iraqi police in France, and blamed delays on the Iraqi side. Thibault also dismissed prospects for training in countries neighboring Iraq, and claimed that the German police training program in the UAE had faced numerous setbacks related to training in a third-country.

16. (C) Asked about prospects for French assistance in the electricity and water sectors, where French companies have a track record in Iraq and the U.S. is looking for more international assistance partners, Thibault cited security problems as the chief barrier to French companies' involvement on the ground in Iraq. MFA DAS-equivalent for Iraq Sivan noted that, in addition to security concerns, French companies needed a "signature from the Iraqi state" to guarantee contracts, before they would be willing to return to Iraq in large numbers. Sivan added further that the GoF would be able to increase cooperation with Iraq, only if the next government had good and capable ministers, in control of budgets and staff. Sivan repeated anecdotes (reported reftel) on the incompetence of ITG ministers who had visited Paris (with the exception of FM Zebari), and added that the Iraqi ambassador to France, while a pleasant man, was usually uninformed of ministerial visits.

17. (C) In response to Deutsch's encouragement for positive action to send EU election monitors to Iraq, Sivan described security risks as preventing deployment of EU election monitors, as the European Commission didn't want to risk putting new people on the ground. Instead, EU members with embassies on the ground would make their own decisions on how to monitor the December 15 balloting. (Note: UK embassy contacts reported to us separately December 8 that during recent EU discussions in Brussels, the GoF led opposition to EU Iraq election monitors being deployed to Iraq, based on security risks. End note.)

18. (C) On a more positive note, Thibault reaffirmed that the GoF would be signing within days a debt reduction agreement with Iraq in line with Paris Club terms, worth some 4 billion euros. Deutsch welcomed the debt agreement as good news, and suggested that the GoF should, like the U.S., appeal to GCC governments to offer Iraq debt reduction at least as good as the Paris Club terms. Boche appeared open to the idea, but made no commitment. MFA DAS-equivalent Sivan, meanwhile, described the debt problem as a good barometer of Iraq's relations with its Arab neighbors. In Sivan's view, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in particular were reluctant to deal with a Shi'a-led Iraqi government; a gesture on debt relief from either government would be a major step forward and signify long-term confidence in Iraq's government. Sivan speculated that it would take GCC governments some time to make a gesture on debt relief, but slow progress was better than none at all.

NO IMMEDIATE TROOP WITHDRAWAL, BUT NEED FOR "PERSPECTIVE"  
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9. (C) GoF officials stressed that the GoF was not calling for an immediate U.S. pull-out from Iraq, which would bring disastrous results. Boche described a premature pull-out as an "electro-shock" which would negatively affect the entire region. At the same time, Boche stressed the need for the U.S. to give the "perspective" that it was not in Iraq "for eternity," in order to divide the terrorists from resistance.

Thibault, meanwhile, asserted that giving a clear perspective to the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq would prove an essential part of achieving "inclusiveness" in the new governing arrangements. Deutsch reiterated that we had no intention to maintain an indefinite U.S. presence in Iraq, but that nearly all Iraqis were in agreement that an immediate pullout would be disastrous. Deutsch noted our commitment to stand down as the Iraqis stood up and also stressed that the continued trend of Iraqis assuming increasing responsibility would allow the MNF numbers to progressively decrease as conditions permit.

IRAN/SYRIA, UNMOVIC

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10. (C) Sivan generally agreed with the U.S. assessment of Syria's destabilizing influence with regards to Iraq, but suggested that GoF focus on Syria would remain Lebanon-centric. As reported reftel, Sivan commented on the degree to which FM Zebari, during his recent visit to Paris, was much tougher on Syria than Iran. On the Iranian role in Iraq, French questions focused on what role Iran, in the U.S. view, should play in Iraq, without offering substantive views in response.

11. (C) After seeking Deutsch's views on the potential for an increased UN role in Iraq, MFA UN/Iraq action officer Nicolas Kassianides described a just-completed trip to New York, where he had consulted with USUN, UKUN, and Secretariat officials on Iraq issues. Kassianides described UN Secretariat officials as keen to increase the UN role in Iraq

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after December elections, and asked whether there was "space" for the UN in the political process, particularly in advising the constitutional commission. Deutsch reiterated U.S. openness to an increased UN role, which up to now had been limited due to UN security concerns and the consequent shortage of UN personnel on the ground in Iraq. Kassianides also raised upcoming UNSC discussions on UNMOVIC, and suggested that there should be an eventual certification of Iraq's disarmament, which could require transmission of the Iraq Survey Group (ISG) report to UNSCOM. In closing, Kassianides agreed with Deutsch that the UNSC should avoid contentious discussions on Iraq-related issues, and that the U.S. and France shared common goals on certifying Iraqi disarmament.

12. (U) This message has been cleared by Deputy Senior Iraq Advisor Deutsch.  
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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Stapleton